

# The Armenian Genocide of 1915

**Lesson Plans and Study Guide  
(addressing SOL World History II, 11b)**



**Supplemental material for history/social studies instruction designed  
for use by the high schools in Virginia**

**Produced by: The Education Center  
St. James Armenian Church of Richmond, Virginia**

**To: Teachers**

**Subject: Lesson for SOL World History II, 11b, 1500 AD - Present, Era VII**

During the early months of 2001, the Virginia Department of Education reviewed and updated the Standards of Learning and Curriculum Framework for teachers in History/Social Sciences. These lessons and study guide on the Armenian Genocide of 1915 have been developed to address WH II, 11b: *examples of other genocides* (in addition to the Holocaust).

The Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust are the most typical instances of total genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Armenian Genocide of 1915 went unchecked and was quickly forgotten by the world. The Armenian Genocide of 1915 was the first major genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the forerunner for subsequent 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides. By studying this genocide, students will be able to see the relationships between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust.

The complete kit, which was mailed March 2002 to the attention of your history department chairman includes:

- Two lesson plans (**which you can print from this document**) based on two films (a 25 minute film which is included in the mailed packet); a 50 minute plan for the mailed video and a \*20 minute lesson plan (**see instructions below for accessing film**)
- One VHS video, *The Armenian Genocide*, 25 minutes
- Fact Sheet on the Armenian Genocide
- Frequently Asked Questions about the Armenian Genocide
- Vocabulary with definitions
- Background information with 3 maps and the booklet: *The Armenians: Shadows of a Forgotten Genocide*
- Review questions with answers and questions for writing and journal assignments
- Bibliography of books and web sites
- Evaluation form, self addressed and stamped envelope

\*Due to copyright limitations, we could not reproduce individual school copies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> film, *ABC News, The Century: The Forgotten Genocide*. It can be accessed on the following web site: [www.theforgotten.org/intro.html](http://www.theforgotten.org/intro.html). **For Virginia's public schools, the film can also be ordered from the Department of Education's Teleproductions Office video library (VHS format, film # 990606) by calling (804) 225-2980 or (804) 692-0336. This is an excellent five-minute film. It is well worth the effort to order it.** The accompanying 20 minute lesson plan along with the film cover several SOLs and provide a short but extremely effective lesson plan on genocide.

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Please direct any questions or requests for speakers on this topic to: The Education Center, St. James Armenian Church, 834 Pepper Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23226. Telephone (804) 282-3818.  
Email: [educationcenter@i-c.net](mailto:educationcenter@i-c.net) Web site: <http://www.armenian-educationcenter.org>

We hope this Armenian Genocide kit will be of service to you in teaching the events of history, and most importantly, the value of human rights for all people.

Richard Kevorkian, Professor Emeritus, Virginia Commonwealth University, Director

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## Acknowledgements

ABC Evening News Special Report by Peter Jennings: *The Century: The Forgotten Genocide* [www.theforgotten.org/intro.html](http://www.theforgotten.org/intro.html)

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Armenian National Committee, 80 Bigelow Ave., Watertown, MA 02172  
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Armenian National Institute, 122 C Street, NW, Suite 360, Washington, DC  
<http://www.armenian-genocide.org>

Atlantis Productions, Inc., Thousand Oaks, CA

Britannica Encyclopaedia Inc., 100 State St., Teaneck, NJ 07666-5200

National Geographic Society, Washington, DC

The Education Center, St. James Armenian Church, 834 Pepper Ave., Richmond, VA 23226. (804) 282-3818; Email: [educationcenter@i-c.net](mailto:educationcenter@i-c.net)  
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Richard Kevorkian – cover design / photograph of Armenian Genocide Memorial in Yerevan, Armenia

# **BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915**

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## BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915

- Lesson plan, 45-60 minutes
- Important concepts and vocabulary (student's copy)
- Vocabulary with definitions (teacher's copy)
- Historical and geographical background
- Review questions (for class discussion or written assignments)
- Questions for writing or journal assignments
- Suggested review questions and answers (teacher's copy)
- Extension activities
- Additional film credits
- Comparison of Armenian Genocide of 1915 and Jewish Holocaust

## **Lesson Plan: Before the Holocaust: The Armenian Genocide of 1915**

**Target Curriculum:** History & Social Science, World History II, 11b

**Target Grades:** 9 and 10

**Time:** 45 - 60 minutes

**Objective:** To know the meaning of genocide, to understand that genocide is not an isolated phenomenon, but a method of oppressing human rights that occurs throughout history, and to identify warning signals and attitudes that may lead to genocide.

**Purpose:** The student will recognize and interpret the importance of the Armenian Genocide as:

- An example of unchecked human rights violations
- The first major genocide of the 20th century
- The precursor of the Jewish Holocaust
- A model for subsequent 20th century genocides

**Materials:**

- Teacher's study guide for Armenian Genocide
- Student handouts on Armenian Genocide
- Television set with VCR
- Film: *The Armenian Genocide*, \* Atlantis Production, Inc., 25 min.

**Procedure:**

- Locate Turkey, Syria, Russia, and eastern Turkey (the historical provinces of ancient Armenia) on the map.
- Distribute student handouts for the Armenian Genocide.
- Discuss the definition of genocide and ask if the students know of any examples of genocide in history or in current events.
- Discuss the important concepts and vocabulary and ask the students to look for examples during the film.
- Show the video, *The Armenian Genocide* - 25 min., Atlantis Production.
- Use the Review Questions section for discussion and/or written assignment.

**\*Genocide is a crime against humanity. As a result of the nature of the subject, some of the footage in the film includes dead bodies, beheaded figures, as well as the stories of murder that occurred.**

**Conclusion:** Students should be able to define genocide, and understand that genocide is a method used to oppress human rights and occurs throughout history. They should be able to give examples of the danger signals, attitudes, and behaviors that can lead to genocide. Students should be able to recognize the consequences of human rights violations, which are allowed to go unchallenged.

**Important Concepts:**

- 1. Genocide:** This is the systematic and purposeful destruction of a racial, political, religious or cultural group, and is not an isolated phenomenon, but occurs throughout history.
- 2. Danger signals for genocide:** These include dictatorship, racist or supernationalistic ideology, use of minorities as scapegoats for societal problems, especially during wartime, or during disintegration of a nation or empire.
- 3. Attitudes and behaviors that can lead to genocide:** examples include ethnic discrimination, vandalism, racial slurs, hate crimes, and religious bigotry.

**Vocabulary**

Have the students look up the definitions in the dictionary. In small groups discuss the meanings. Are the dictionary definitions relevant to our time? Can there be alternative definitions? Depending on who is defining the terms, can these terms have positive or negative meanings?

dehumanize  
authoritarian  
racist ideology  
dictatorial  
expansionist  
nationalist  
supernationalist  
conversion of religion  
pluralistic society

deportation  
Pan-Turkism  
principality  
intervention  
ethnic group  
persecution  
subject peoples  
precursor  
annihilation

bigotry  
genocide  
oppression  
infidels  
reforms  
censorship  
tyranny  
pogrom

## **Vocabulary Definitions**

1. **dehumanize** - to treat or regard in a less than humanly way
2. **authoritarian** - unquestioning obedience to authority
3. **racist ideology** - belief in the superiority of one race over another
4. **dictatorial** - tyrannical, domineering
5. **expansionist**- the policy of expanding a nation's territory or its sphere of influence
6. **nationalist** - the doctrine that national interests and security are more important than international considerations
7. **supernationalist** - extreme nationalism
8. **conversion of religion** - to change from one religion to another
9. **pluralistic society** - a society having groups of distinctive ethnic origins, cultural patterns, religion or the like
10. **deportation** - expulsion of those deemed undesirable from a country
11. **Pan-Turkism** - a belief in a Turkish state inhabited by Turkish people only
12. **principality** - territory ruled by a prince
13. **intervention** - any interference in the affairs of others, especially by one country in the affairs of another
14. **ethnic group** - a group of people having a common cultural heritage or nationality
15. **persecution** - to oppress cruelly for reasons of race, religion or politics
16. **subject peoples** - groups of people of different nationalities under the authority, rule or power of a different nation; for example: Greeks, Armenians, or Serbs under the rule of the Ottoman Empire
17. **precursor** - one that precedes and indicates the approach of another; forerunner
18. **annihilation** - the act of destroying completely
19. **bigotry** - intolerance; prejudice
20. **genocide** - the systematic and purposeful destruction of a racial, political, religious or cultural group
21. **oppression** - the act of suppression by cruel or unjust use of power or authority
22. **infidel** - a person who does not believe in a particular religion
23. **reforms** - acts intended to improve social or political conditions
24. **censorship** - the act of removing or prohibiting anything considered objectionable
25. **pogrom** - an organized persecution and massacre of a minority people sanctioned by the government
26. **tyranny** - cruel and unjust use of power or authority



### **Historical Background**

The Armenians established their first historic principality in the 7<sup>th</sup> century before Christ. Powerful empires, such as those of ancient Persia, Rome, and the Mongols, interrupted long periods of Armenian independence.

In 301 AD, Armenia became the first country to accept Christianity as the state religion. In the centuries that followed, the Armenians continued to make significant contributions in the areas of art, trade, literature, the sciences, and particularly in architecture.

The first Turkish invasions of the Armenian homeland began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Turks made Armenia a part of the Ottoman Empire. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire were experiencing a cultural and intellectual awakening. They were influenced through commercial activity and contacts with Europe and America.

As the European states resisted the extension of Turkish power, the once massive Ottoman Empire diminished in size. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, subject peoples such as Greeks, Serbs, and Romanians secured their independence. By the time of World War I in 1914, the Armenians and the Arabs were the principal subject peoples in the Middle East, still living under the authoritarian rule of the Turks.

As the Ottoman administrative system began to break down through corruption and mismanagement, oppression against the Armenian minority increased. Although a vast number of Armenians were peasants, many Turks were envious of the Armenians who were the professionals, the businessmen and the skilled craftsmen. The Armenians were treated as second-class citizens and were branded as a religious minority. They were called “infidels” or non-believers. Discriminatory taxes levied on Armenians were increased. Persecutions also increased.

The Armenians lived in a climate of tyranny. In some areas, they were afraid to speak their language openly, or read Armenian history books. Sultan Abdul Hamid, the ruler of the Ottoman Empire from 1876-1909, banned many Armenian books. He established censorship because he feared scientific and social ideas from the West. Between 1894 and 1896, in answer to demands for reform, he had more than 100,000 Armenians massacred in widespread pogroms.

During times of persecution, the Armenians looked in vain to Europe to intercede on their behalf. Because European intervention was ineffective against Turkish tyranny, some Armenians took up arms in self-defense. The Turks feared that the Armenians would someday make demands to pull out of the Empire, just as the Balkan states had previously done.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Armenians were asking for basic democratic reforms and constitutional government. They were asking for an equal place in society, the right to vote, and freedom from harassment and persecution.

On the eve of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was in a period of intense crisis. Reform-minded Turkish nationalists took control of the tottering government in 1908. The Armenians were overjoyed, however, within a few years, Turkish national extremists seized power and embarked upon a reign of terror.

Enver Pasha, Talaat Pasha, Djemal Pasha, and a group of other dictatorial Turkish rulers subscribed to the elitist or racist ideology of Pan-Turkism, a belief in Turkey for the Turks only. They rejected the idea of a pluralistic society, wherein all people, including minorities, would be assured of equal rights.

The fundamental belief of Pan-Turkism was to change a multi-national, multi-cultural, and multi-religious empire into a state inhabited by Turkish peoples as far away as Central Asia. The Armenians lived in the very path of the Turkish expansionist plan. Thus, the Turkish rulers decided to eliminate them.

### **Geographic Background**

Historic Armenia is located at the crossroads of three continents – Europe, Asia, and Africa. It was bounded by the Caucasus Mountains and the Black Sea to the north, the Caspian Sea to the east, the Syrian Desert to the south, Anatolia to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the southwest. Historically, the Armenian people have been divided between the Turkish Ottoman Empire, the Russian Empire, and Persia. What remains of Armenia was incorporated as part of the Soviet Union in 1920 as its smallest republic, although it had been an independent republic between 1918-1920. In 1991, Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union. Currently it borders on Turkey, Georgia, Iran and Azerbaijan.

**Review Questions (for class discussion or written assignments)**

1. Name two genocides that occurred during the 20th century.
2. Why did the Armenian Genocide occur? What events in Armenian and Turkish history paved the way for genocide?
3. How was the Armenian Genocide committed or carried out (order of events)?
4. How would observance of basic human rights (freedom, equality, justice, and democracy) have prevented the Armenian Genocide? Give examples.
5. Are there conditions in our world today where genocide would be possible? Give examples.
6. What can be done on a global, national, and personal level to prevent other genocides from occurring?
7. What was the Armenian “cultural and intellectual awakening?” Why did Turkish nationalists perceive this as a threat?

**Questions for writing or journal assignments**

1. The Armenian Genocide happened in 1915. Why is it important to study it today? Can a genocide happen today?
2. Have you or your friends ever made fun of someone, or picked on him/her until he/she became upset or angry? Have you stood by while someone was ridiculed? If so, why did you do it, and how did you feel? How could this escalate into something much more serious?
3. The following quotation has been attributed to Pastor Martin Niemoller in Nazi Germany:  
*“...First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist, so I said nothing. Then they came for Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat. So I did nothing. Then they came for the trade unionists, but I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew... so I did little. Then they came for me. And there was no one left who could stand for me.”*

How does this quote relate to genocide? What are some of the reasons people don’t speak up or take a stand when the rights of others are threatened? What could Armenians and non-Armenians in the Ottoman Empire have done to prevent the Genocide? What responsibility did other countries have to stop the Genocide? In a non-democratic society, who speaks up? How does this apply to the world today?

4. List examples of threats to personal freedoms which exist in today’s world? Keeping in mind the quote above, how do these threats impact you? What can you do as an individual to help preserve a democratic society?

**Suggested Review Questions and Answers (for the teacher)**

1. Name two genocides that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.
  - a. Jewish Holocaust.
  - a. Ottoman Empire's genocide of Armenians.
  - b. Bosnia's genocide of the Muslims and Croats.
  - c. Rwandan Hutu genocide of Tutsi minority.
  - d. The genocide committed by the Cambodian government of Pol Pot of the intellectuals, artists, technicians, monks and former government officials and minorities in favor of a pro-peasant state.
  
2. Why did the Armenian Genocide occur? What events in Armenian and Turkish history paved the way?
  - a. The Armenian Genocide occurred because:
    - The Young Turks' Pan-Turkism ideology (Turkey for the Turks only).
    - The Turks were afraid the Armenians would join Russia in the war against Turkey.
    - Several Armenian villages bordered Russia and Turkey and were seen as an obstruction to the Ottoman's expansionist plan into central Asia.
  - b. Historical events that paved the way for the Armenian Genocide to occur:
    - The Ottoman Empire was crumbling, and the loss of territory in Europe and Africa.
    - The rise of the Young Turks who took over the Ottoman government, and later implemented the ideology of Pan-Turkism (Turkey for the Turks only).
    - Armenians' cultural and intellectual awakening and their demands for fair treatment and equal place in society.
    - Turkey became allied with Germany in WW I against England, France and Russia. Turkey was promised territory extending into central Asia.
  
3. How was the Genocide committed or carried out? (order of events)
  - Armenian soldiers in the Turkish Army were disarmed, given hard work detail, and later killed.
  - Educational, political, religious, and cultural leaders were arrested and then killed.
  - Government decree sent to local officials throughout the Ottoman Empire ordering leaders to incite hatred against the Armenian population.
  - The women, children, and elderly men were sent on death marches into the desert under the guise of relocation.
  - The Turks confiscated all property and wealth from the Armenians.

**Suggested Review Questions and Answers Continued**

4. How would observance of basic human rights (freedom, equality, justice) have prevented the Armenian Genocide? Give examples.
  - The Armenians were not interested in leaving their ancestral land; they were asking for equal and just treatment as citizens in the country in which they lived. If treated as equal citizens, they had no cause to leave.
  - Freedom of religion – would have insured their rights to live as Christians
  - Equal treatment – would have eliminated the additional taxes levied against the Armenians, and other legal restrictions as a minority
  - Equal justice – would have allowed Armenians to file charges against Muslims who mistreated or cheated them. As it was, they were prohibited from being a witness against a Muslim.
  
5. Are there conditions in our world where genocide would be possible? Give examples.
  - Ireland – religious war between the Catholics and Protestants.
  - Afghanistan’s Taliban and al-Qaida Muslim terrorist acts against the United States and other western countries.
  - War between Palestinians and Israelis.
  - Hate crimes in U.S and other countries.
  - Iraq and Afghanistan are countries which have crumbling economies and military regimes; both harbor hatred towards the western world.
  
6. What can be done on a global, national, and personal level to prevent other genocides from occurring?
  - An emphasis on human rights education and a study of past and present human rights abuses.
  - United Nations has already taken some action on human rights issues, but they need to be more forceful and timely; educate other nations on the value of human rights laws for their people.
  - The United States should actively condemn human rights abuses by other governments even if they are our friends and supporters.
  - Individually, we can educate ourselves on human rights issues in order to uphold the rights of all people.
  
7. What was the Armenian “cultural and intellectual awakening?” Why would this threaten Turkish nationalists?
  - Armenians through education, commercial activities and contacts with Europe and America were influenced by western ideas and the democratic process which was in direct opposition to Pan-Turkism.

### **Extension Activities**

1. Compare the Armenian Genocide and the Holocaust. How are they similar and different?
2. Read a survivor's account or biography of genocide.
4. Write the Armenian National Institute, 122 C. Street NW, Suite 360, Washington DC 20001 for more information and materials on Armenian life and the Genocide. Ask for the *Fact Sheet: The Armenian Genocide* as well as other materials.  
Web site: [www.armenian-genocide.org](http://www.armenian-genocide.org)
5. Write to Amnesty International about areas where genocide may be occurring today. Amnesty International, USA, 322 Eighth Ave. New York, NY 10001.  
Web site: [www.amnestyusa.org](http://www.amnestyusa.org)
5. Use the internet to research other genocides.
6. Read accounts of Turkish denial.
7. Are there conditions today in our world where genocide would be possible? Research the areas listed in the film to determine if the danger signals of genocide exist. As the student researches the areas, he/she should take into consideration the burning of the Brazilian rain forests and its effect on the native population; minorities, particularly the Kurds in the Middle East; the fate of the Native North Americans; and conflict between religious groups, such as Muslims and Hindus in India.
8. Invite a speaker on the subject of the Armenian Genocide.

### **Additional Film Credits**

The headline titles running under the montage scenes of fire and skulls are from the *New York Times*, 1915 - 1916.

Other newspaper headlines are from the *New Chronicle* of Thousand Oaks, CA, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Los Angeles Daily News*.

The Hitler quotes, dated August 22, 1939, are from the book, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide* by Kevork B. Bardakjian, page 1, published by the Zoryan Institute of Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1985. The quotation can also be found on page 6 of the *New York Times* in the October 18, 1942 edition. It is included again in the book, *Documents on British Foreign Policy 1919-1939*, edited by E. L. Woodward and Rohan Butler, 3rd series, volume VII, 1939 (London, 1954) on page 257.

## **Comparing the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust**

### **Similarities:**

- Both genocides were state-initiated policies with the intent to eliminate the Armenians from the Ottoman Empire, the Jews from Germany and Europe.
- Both victim groups were used as scapegoats for internal problems.
- Both victim groups were religious and ethnic minorities in the countries in which they lived.
- Both genocides occurred during the disintegration of a regime or empire.
- Both genocides occurred during world wars.
- Both victim groups were defenseless; firearms had been confiscated.
- Both victim groups have a history of persecution.
- Both victim groups were persecuted because of religion and ethnicity.
- Both victim groups adhere to an ancient religion.
- Both victim groups had strong positions in the economic arena of the countries in which they lived.
- Both governments formed and used special forces to implement the genocides.
- Initial preparation and implementation for both genocides were conducted in secrecy and with strict discipline.
- Books were destroyed for both victim groups.

### **Differences:**

- Armenians were living on their ancestral homeland.
- Jews were scattered throughout Germany, Europe, and beyond.
- Jews were demonized and stigmatized as an inferior race; the escalation of the anti-Semitic movement culminated in their near annihilation.
- Armenians were stigmatized as “infidels”.
- Armenians were looking for fair and just treatment, territorial autonomy, and self-administration.
- In some cases, if the Armenians rejected their Christianity and accepted Islam as their religion and declared themselves to be Turkish, their lives might be spared. They sometimes had a choice.
- Jews were looking for assimilation and integration into another culture, but there was no hope of acceptance or choice, only death.
- The intent of the Holocaust was to eliminate the Jews on a global level (global genocide).
- The intent of the Armenian Genocide was to eliminate Armenians from the Ottoman Empire (domestic genocide).
- The government of Turkey continues to deny the genocide of the Armenians.

## BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915

- Lesson plan, 20 minutes
- Questions and suggested answers (teacher's copy)
- Questions worksheet (student's copy)
- Vocabulary with definitions



## Lesson Plan: Before the Holocaust: The Armenian Genocide of 1915

**Target Curriculum:** History & Social Science, World History II, 11b

**Target Grades:** 9 and 10

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Objective:** To know the meaning of genocide, to understand that genocide is not an isolated phenomenon, but a method of oppressing human rights that occurs throughout history, and to identify some warning signals and attitudes that may lead to genocide.

**Purpose:** The students will recognize the importance of the Armenian Genocide as:

- An example of unchecked human rights violations
- The first major genocide of the 20<sup>th</sup> century
- The precursor of the Jewish Holocaust
- A model for subsequent 20<sup>th</sup> century genocides

**Materials:**

- Teacher's study guide for Armenian Genocide
- Student's handout of *The Forgotten Genocide*
- Television set with VCR
- Film: *ABC News, The Century: The Forgotten Genocide* (5 minutes)  
can be accessed from the following website:  
[www.theforgotten.org/intro.html](http://www.theforgotten.org/intro.html)

For Virginia's public schools, the film (VHS format, film #990606) can be ordered from The Virginia Department of Education's Teleproductions Office video library by calling (804) 225-2980 or (804) 692-0336.

Both lesson plans, study guide, and all supplemental materials (including maps, bibliography, and web sites) can be accessed at the web sites below:  
Education Center: <http://www.armenian-educationcenter.org>  
VA PEN: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Instruction/ArmenianGenocide.shtml>

**Procedure:**

- Locate Turkey on the map.
- Distribute student handouts for the video *The Forgotten Genocide*.\*
- Go over definitions.
- Go over questions before showing video. Direct students to look for answers to the questions while watching the film. Students can share answers with the class after viewing the video.

**Notes:** A variation to the above procedure would be to divide the class into three groups and give two questions to each group. Because of the extensive amount of information included in this five-minute film, it may be useful to view it a second time.

**\*Genocide is a crime against humanity. As a result of the nature of the subject, some of the footage in the film includes dead bodies, beheaded figures, as well as the stories of murder that occurred.**

## **Lesson Plan: Before the Holocaust: The Armenian Genocide of 1915**

### **Questions and suggested answers (teacher's copy)**

**View this film with the following questions in mind:**

**1. What examples of human rights abuses can you identify?**

Physical, emotional, and spiritual abuses: forced deportations, rape, starvation, and widespread massacres.

Victims did not have a legal justice system to protect them.

Denied religious and cultural freedom; their homes, property and wealth were confiscated.

**2. In what way did the “Forgotten Genocide”(Armenian) help Hitler during World War II?**

Hitler's reference to the Armenian Genocide, “Who remembers the Armenians...?” indicates his confidence that a Holocaust against Jews would be forgotten also.

**3. How did the Young Turks’ “pan-Turkic” ideology affect the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?**

This racist attitude and intolerance to minorities was the foundation for a form of ethnic cleansing, and the Armenians were the main target.

**4. What were the Ottoman government's reasons for eliminating the Armenians?**

By eliminating the Armenian Christian minority, they would be furthering their goal of establishing a “pan-Turkic” state—a “Turkey for Turks only.” They would also rid the country of those who were asking for reforms. In addition, there existed a fear that the Armenians would join the Russians to fight the Turks during this time.

**5. What was the Ottoman government's plan for destroying the Armenian people?**

The plan was to disarm Armenian soldiers in the Turkish Army, put them on hard work detail and eventually kill them; to eliminate the religious, economic, political, and cultural leaders in the Armenian communities; to confiscate weapons from the remaining Armenian population and force march them through the deserts to their deaths under the guise of “relocation.”

**6. Who was Armin Wegner? What was his role in bringing the Armenian Genocide to the world's attention and what were his risks?**

Germany and Turkey were allies during World War I. Wegner was a medic in the German army stationed in Turkey. His photographing the massacred Armenians was an act of treason, but his photographs were sent to Germany and the United States and alerted the world to what was taking place in Turkey. He was later arrested and eventually sent back to Germany. He has provided definitive proof of what the Ottoman government tried to keep secret; his photographs provide an irrefutable rebuttal to the continued denial by Turkey's present-day government.

## **Lesson Plan: Before the Holocaust: The Armenian Genocide of 1915**

**Questions for the student:** As you look at the video, look for the answers to the following questions and write them down in the space provided:

- 1. What human rights abuses can you identify from the video?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2. In what way did the “Forgotten Genocide”(Armenian) help Hitler during WW II?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3. How did the Young Turks’ “pan-Turkic” idea affect the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4. What were the Ottoman government’s reasons for eliminating the Armenians?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5. What was the Ottoman government’s plan for destroying the Armenian people?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 6. Who was Armin Wegner? What was Armin Wegner’s role in bringing the Armenian Genocide to the world’s attention and what were his risks?**

## Lesson Plan: Before the Holocaust: The Armenian Genocide of 1915

### Vocabulary

1. **coup** (coup d'état) – a sudden violent overthrow of a government by a smaller group
2. **deportation** – expulsion of those deemed undesirable from a country
3. **ethnic group** – a group of people having a common cultural heritage or nationality
4. **genocide** – the systematic and purposeful destruction of a racial, political, religious or cultural group
5. **massacre** – the killing of many persons under cruel or atrocious circumstances; a wholesale slaughter
6. **Ottoman Empire** – Muslim empire of the Turks from 1300 to 1920
7. **Pan-Turkic** – a belief in a Turkish state inhabited by Turkish people only
8. **perpetrator** – one who is guilty of executing a crime
9. **racist ideology** – belief in the superiority of one race over another
10. **Talaat Pasha** – Ottoman Turkish leader referred to today as the Turkish Hitler
11. **Young Turks** – A group of young Turks who replaced the Sultan's government by means of a coup in 1908

## BEFORE THE HOLOCAUST: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE OF 1915

Supplemental materials:

- Fact Sheet (Armenian National Committee)
- Frequently Asked Questions (Armenian National Institute)
- Bibliography (books and web sites)
- Teacher Evaluation form

## FACT SHEET: THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the Armenian population of the Ottoman (Turkish) Empire became the target of increasing persecution by the Ottoman government. These persecutions culminated in a three decade period during which millions of Armenians were systematically uprooted from their homeland of 3,000 years and eliminated through massacres and exile.

### THE PATTERN OF PERSECUTION: 1894-1922

1894-1896	300,000 Armenians massacred during the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abdul-Hamid II
1909	30,000 Armenians massacred in the area of Cilicia.
1915-1922	1,500,000 Armenians killed, more than 500,000 exiled from the Ottoman Empire.

By the beginning of World War 1, there were more than 2,500,000 living in the Ottoman Empire; today, fewer than 100,000 declared Armenians remain in Turkey, most of them in Istanbul and Western Turkey. The Eastern provinces, the Armenian heartland, are virtually without Armenians.

### APRIL 24 - THE BEGINNING OF THE 1915 GENOCIDE

1) On April 24, 1915, hundreds of Armenian religious, political and intellectual leaders were rounded up, exiled and eventually murdered in remote places in Anatolia.

2) Within several months, the approximately 250,000 Armenians serving in the Ottoman army during WWI were disarmed and placed in forced labor battalions where they were either starved or executed.

3) The Armenian people, deprived of their leadership and young able-bodied men and disarmed under threat of severe punishment, were then deported from every city, town and village of Asia Minor and Turkish Armenia. In most instances during the death marches, the men and older boys were quickly separated and executed soon after leaving town. The unprotected women and children were marched for weeks into the Syrian desert and subjected to rape, torture, and mutilation along the way. Thousands were seized and forced into Turkish and Kurdish homes and harems. The majority of the deportees died on the marches of forced starvation, disease and massacres.

4) Approximately 500,000 refugees escaped to the north across the Russian border, south into Arab countries, or to Europe and the United States. Thus, the Armenian community of the Ottoman Empire was virtually eliminated as a result of a carefully executed government plan of genocide.

*"When the Turkish authorities gave the orders for these deportations, they were merely giving the death warrant to a whole race: they understood this well, and, in their conversations with me, they made no particular attempt to conceal the fact."*

*"I am confident that the whole history of the human race contains no such horrible episode as this. The great massacres and persecutions of the past seem almost insignificant when compared to the sufferings of the Armenian race in 1915."*

Henry Morgenthau  
U.S. Ambassador to Turkey  
"Ambassador Morgenthau's Story"  
(Doubleday Garden City 1918)

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# Frequently Asked Questions about the Armenian Genocide

What is the Armenian Genocide?

Who was responsible for the Armenian Genocide?

How many people died in the Armenian Genocide?

Were there witnesses to the Armenian Genocide?

What was the response of the international community to the Armenian Genocide?

Why is the Armenian Genocide commemorated on April 24?

Are the Armenian massacres acknowledged today as a Genocide according to the United Nations Genocide Convention?

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## What is the Armenian Genocide?

The atrocities committed against the Armenian people of the Ottoman Empire during W.W.I are called the Armenian Genocide. Genocide is the organized killing of a people for the express purpose of putting an end to their collective existence. Because of its scope, genocide requires central planning and a machinery to implement it. This makes genocide the quintessential state crime as only a government has the resources to carry out such a scheme of destruction. The Armenian Genocide was centrally planned and administered by the Turkish government against the entire Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. It was carried out during W.W.I between the years 1915 and 1918. The Armenian people was subjected to deportation, expropriation, abduction, torture, massacre, and starvation. The great bulk of the Armenian population was forcibly removed from Armenia and Anatolia to Syria, where the vast majority was sent into the desert to die of thirst and hunger. Large numbers of Armenians were methodically massacred throughout the Ottoman Empire. Women and children were abducted and horribly abused. The entire wealth of the Armenian people was expropriated. After only a little more than a year of calm at the end of W.W.I, the atrocities were renewed between 1920 and 1923, and the remaining Armenians were subjected to further massacres and expulsions. In 1948, thirty-three years before UN Genocide Convention was adopted, the Armenian Genocide was condemned by the international community as a crime against humanity.

## Who was responsible for the Armenian Genocide?

The decision to carry out a genocide against the Armenian people was made by the political party in power in the Ottoman Empire. This was the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) (or *Ittihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*), popularly known as the Young Turks. Three figures from the CUP controlled the government; Mehmet Talaat, Minister of the Interior in 1915 and Grand Vizier (Prime Minister) in 1917; Ismail Enver, Minister of War; Ahmed Jemal, Minister of the Marine and Military Governor of Syria. This Young Turk triumvirate relied on other members of the CUP appointed to high government posts and assigned to military commands to carry out the Armenian Genocide. In addition to the Ministry of War and the Ministry of the Interior, the Young Turks also relied on a newly-created secret outfit which they manned with convicts and irregular troops, called the Special Organization (*Teshkilati Mahsusa*). Its primary function was the carrying out of the mass slaughter of the deported Armenians. In charge of the Special Organization was Behaeddin Shakir, a medical doctor. Moreover, ideologists such as Zia Gokalp propagandized through the media on behalf of the CUP by promoting Pan-Turanism, the creation of a new empire stretching from Anatolia into Central Asia whose population would be exclusively Turkic. These concepts

justified and popularized the secret CUP plans to liquidate the Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turk conspirators, other leading figures of the wartime Ottoman government, members of the CUP Central Committee, and many provincial administrators responsible for atrocities against the Armenians were indicted for their crimes at the end of the war. The main culprits evaded justice by fleeing the country. Even so, they were tried in absentia and found guilty of capital crimes. The massacres, expulsions, and further mistreatment of the Armenians between 1920 and 1923 were carried by the Turkish Nationalists, who represented a new political movement opposed to the Young Turks, but who shared a common ideology of ethnic exclusivity.

### **How many people died in the Armenian Genocide?**

It is estimated that one and a half million Armenians perished between 1915 and 1923. There were an estimated two million Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of W.W.I. Well over a million were deported in 1915. Hundreds of thousands were butchered outright. Many others died of starvation, exhaustion, and epidemics which ravaged the concentration camps. Among the Armenians living along the periphery of the Ottoman Empire many at first escaped the fate of their countrymen in the central provinces of Turkey. Tens of thousands in the east fled to the Russian border to lead a precarious existence as refugees. The majority of the Armenians in Constantinople, the capital city, were spared deportation. In 1918, however, the Young Turk regime took the war into the Caucasus, where approximately 1,800,000 Armenians lived under Russian dominion. Ottoman forces advancing through East Armenia and Azerbaijan here too engaged in systematic massacres. The expulsions and massacres carried by the Nationalist Turks between 1920 and 1922 added tens of thousands of more victims. By 1923 the entire landmass of Asia Minor and historic West Armenia had been expunged of its Armenian population. The destruction of the Armenian communities in this part of the world was total.

### **Were there witnesses to the Armenian Genocide?**

There were many witnesses to the Armenian Genocide. Although the Young Turk government took precautions and imposed restrictions on reporting and photographing, there were lots of foreigners in the Ottoman Empire who witnessed the deportations. Foremost among them were U.S. diplomatic representatives and American missionaries. They were first to send news to the outside world about the unfolding genocide. Some of their reports made headline news in the American and Western media. Also reporting on the atrocities committed against the Armenians were many German eyewitnesses. The Germans were allies of the Turks in W.W.I. Numerous German officers held important military assignments in the Ottoman Empire. Some among them condoned the Young Turk policy. Others confidentially reported to their superiors in Germany about the slaughter of the Armenian civilian population. Many Russians saw for themselves the devastation wreaked upon the Armenian communities when the Russian Army occupied parts of Anatolia. Many Arabs in Syria where most of the deportees were sent saw for themselves the appalling condition to which the Armenian survivors had been reduced. Lastly, many Turkish officials were witnesses as participants in the Armenian Genocide. A number of them gave testimony under oath during the post-war tribunals convened to try the Young Turk conspirators who organized the Armenian Genocide.

### **What was the response of the international community to the Armenian Genocide?**

The international community condemned the Armenian Genocide. In May 1915, Great Britain, France, and Russia advised the Young Turk leaders that they would be held personally responsible for this crime against humanity. There was a strong public outcry in the United States against the mistreatment of the Armenians. At the end of the war, the Allied victors demanded that the Ottoman government prosecute the Young Turks accused of wartime crimes. Relief efforts were also mounted to save "the starving Armenians." The American, British, and German governments sponsored the preparation of reports on the atrocities and numerous accounts were published. On the other hand, despite the moral outrage of the international community, no strong actions were taken against the Ottoman Empire either to sanction its brutal policies or to salvage the Armenian people from the grip of extermination. Moreover, no steps were taken to require the postwar Turkish governments to make restitution to the Armenian people for their immense material and human losses.



**Why is the Armenian Genocide commemorated on April 24?**

On the night of April 24, 1915, the Turkish government placed under arrest over 200 Armenian community leaders in Constantinople. Hundreds more were apprehended soon after. They were all sent to prison in the interior of Anatolia, where most were summarily executed. The Young Turk regime had long been planning the Armenian Genocide and reports of atrocities being committed against the Armenians in the eastern war zones had been filtering in during the first months of 1915. The Ministry of War had already acted on the government's plan by disarming the Armenian recruits in the Ottoman Army, reducing them to labor battalions and working them under conditions equaling slavery. The incapacitation and methodic reduction of the Armenian male population, as well as the summary arrest and execution of the Armenian leadership marked the earliest stages of the Armenian Genocide. These acts were committed under the cover of a news blackout on account of the war and the government proceeded to implement its plans to liquidate the Armenian population with secrecy. Therefore, the Young Turks regime's true intentions went undetected until the arrests of April 24. As the persons seized that night included the most prominent public figures of the Armenian community in the capital city of the Ottoman Empire, everyone was alerted about the dimensions of the policies being entertained and implemented by the Turkish government. Their death presaged the murder of an ancient civilization. April 24 is, therefore, commemorated as the date of the unfolding of the Armenian Genocide.

**Are the Armenian massacres acknowledged today as a Genocide according to the United Nations Genocide Convention?**

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, describes genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Clearly this definition applies in the case of the atrocities committed against the Armenians. Because the U.N. Convention was adopted in 1948, thirty years after the Armenian Genocide, Armenians worldwide have sought from their respective governments formal acknowledgment of the crimes committed during W.W.I. Countries like France, Argentina, Greece, and Russia, where the survivors of the Armenian Genocide and their descendants live, have officially recognized the Armenian Genocide. However, as a matter of policy, the present-day Republic of Turkey adamantly denies that a genocide was committed against the Armenians during W.W.I. Moreover, Turkey dismisses the evidence about the atrocities as mere allegations and regularly obstructs efforts for acknowledgment. Affirming the truth about the Armenian Genocide, therefore, has become an issue of international significance. The recurrence of genocide in the twentieth century has made the reaffirmation of the historic acknowledgment of the criminal mistreatment of the Armenians by Turkey all the more a compelling obligation for the international community.



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## **Web Sites**

***Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*** The memoir of the U.S. ambassador to the Ottoman Empire of his experiences during the Armenian Genocide. Includes photos, maps, and discussions with government officials.

<http://www.ku.edu/~libsite/wwi-www/morgenthau/MorgenTC.htm>

***Armenian Education Center of Virginia*** Provides lesson plans and other instructional resources designed to support teachers and students in their teaching and study of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, Armenian history, and culture.

<http://www.armenian-educationcenter.org>

***Armenian National Committee, San Francisco Bay Area***

Provides history, links, and excellent teacher and student resources.

[http://www.ancsf.org/armenian\\_genocide.htm](http://www.ancsf.org/armenian_genocide.htm)

***Armenian National Institute*** A comprehensive site assisting educators utilizing human rights and genocide curricula. Contains a broad assortment of educational resources.

<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/index.htm>

<http://www.armenian-genocide.org/sitemap.htm#resource> – map of web page

***Center of Holocaust and Genocide Studies – University of Minnesota*** – Includes educational support, activities, and curriculum models. Click on *Educational Resources*.

<http://www.chgs.umn.edu/>

***Facing History and Ourselves*** – Excellent resources on the Holocaust and the Armenian Genocide for teachers and students that examine racism, prejudice, and the protection of human rights. Click on *New Resources on the Armenian Genocide*.

[www.facing.org](http://www.facing.org)

***The Forgotten Org. – dedicated to the 1915 Armenian Genocide***

Peter Jennings with ABC Evening News. Video can be downloaded as audio or video to hard drive. The small frame video can be viewed on monitor.

<http://www.theforgotten.org/intro.html>

***Genocides and Ethnic Cleansings of Central and East Europe, the Former USSR, the Caucasus and Adjacent Middle East --1890 – 2000, Virginia Polytechnic Institute;*** A vast site with a number of excellent links. Scroll down to *Specific National, Ethnic or Religious Genocides/Cleansing*.

<http://www.lib.vt.edu/subjects/slav/genocide.html>

***Survivors Memoirs online*** – Biographical accounts of Armenian Genocide survivors.

<http://members.aol.com/Gaghjayan/margret.htm>

[http://cgi-user.brown.edu/Administration/George\\_Street\\_Journal/lastword28.html](http://cgi-user.brown.edu/Administration/George_Street_Journal/lastword28.html)

***20<sup>th</sup> Century History*** – Provides historical facts and essays on genocide and genocide denial.

<http://history1900s.about.com/cs/armeniangenocide/>

### Teacher's Evaluation of: The Armenian Genocide of 1915 Materials

We value your opinions and would very much appreciate your input concerning these lesson plans.

1. Did you use or do you plan to use (please indicate whether you have used it yet or whether you are still planning to do so)?
  - A. The 20 minute lesson plan
  - B. The 50 minute lesson plan
  - C. Both
  - D. Neither
2. Would you recommend this lesson to other history teachers?
  - A. Yes B. No
3. Do you feel this kit was teacher-friendly?
  - A. Very satisfactory B. Satisfactory C. Unsatisfactory
4. Do you plan to use this lesson plan again next year?
  - A. Yes
  - B. No (If not, why?) \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you did not use or plan to use this at all, we would very much appreciate knowing why. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 6 We would like very much to hear what aspects of the lesson were especially helpful or effective and which were not helpful and/or necessary.

Helpful/Effective:

\_\_\_\_\_

Not helpful/Not effective:

\_\_\_\_\_

Please list any suggestions for improvement; use the back for additional comments. For communication purposes, **please include your name, email address, phone number, school name, and address on the back.** Use the self-addressed envelope that was included in the packet. Please duplicate the form for others on your staff willing to give us their opinions and mail to:

**The Education Center  
St. James Armenian Church  
834 Pepper Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23226**

For additional comments or information, please email us at: [educationcenter@i-c.net](mailto:educationcenter@i-c.net)  
Thank you for your input and time.